Self-Monitoring and Its Effect on Reducing Disruptive Behaviors

in General Education Classrooms

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Education 7201-Fall 2011

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**Introduction**

Teaching is a profession that requires its workers to be masters of multitasking. Similar to a juggling act, teachers must shift between planning and preparing for lessons, collaborating with colleagues and administrators, interacting with parents, performing administrative duties, and most importantly teaching their students, throughout any given day. The task of imparting knowledge is no easy feat when you consider the diverse populations of students within school systems. In New York City public schools alone, classrooms often accommodate a minimum of 25 students with various learning abilities and needs, cultural backgrounds, and individual personalities. This melting pot of student bodies is often present within the general education setting. This presents a challenge for teachers to not only provide developmentally appropriate instruction for all students, but also to create an atmosphere conducive to learning. Among a teacher’s many responsibilities is the management of his/her classroom, which plays a significant role in the academic progress of students, as well as their overall well-being (McGown, 2011). It becomes imperative then that teachers establish an effective system to manage students’ behaviors. Behavior management systems are of particular importance when it comes to dealing with students that have challenging behaviors, as they are the ones most in need of effective disciplinary strategies. Research has shown that self-management techniques, in particular self-monitoring, are an effective form of intervention to decrease inappropriate behaviors within a variety of educational settings, and with students with different grade and ability levels (Ganz, 2008).

Statement of the Problem

Students with challenging behaviors present several problems within the classroom. The primary issue is that they disrupt the learning process and are difficult to manage (Westling, 2010). Their disruptive behaviors, such as talking out of turn and getting out of their seats, hinder the learning process for their peers as well as themselves. The amount of time a teacher spends trying to manage these students lessens the amount of time spent on instruction. Furthermore, students that are habitually disruptive are most detrimental to themselves because they increase their chances to be referred for special education services (DuPaul & Hoff, 1998).

Secondly, a teacher’s already heavy workload weighs that much more heavier when teaching becomes a challenge due to students with problematic behavior. Oftentimes, teachers feel that they are not equipped to deal with disruptive students, which leads to feelings of stress (Ducharme & Schecter, 2011). The lack of training in the use of effective classroom management systems during a teacher’s pre-service career contributes to this. Teachers also feel that there is a lack of support within the school setting once they become professionals (Westing, 2010). Unfortunately, the combination of these feelings can sometimes account for teachers leaving the profession after only a short time of service (Clunies, Little, & Kienhuis, 2008).

There have been a variety of methods and procedures implemented in schools at state and citywide levels to address behavioral issues. However, students with disruptive behaviors continue to pose a problem at the classroom level. Traditional behavior management techniques, such as token-reward systems, or the use of detention and principals’ office referrals, depend heavily upon the use of teacher reinforcements, which deduct time that can be used for teaching (Westing, 2010). Clearly, there is a need for an alternative intervention method that would not deter from instructional time, but also help students improve their behaviors.

Review of Related Literature

Discipline has been and continues to be a major concern among educators. According to Smith and Rivera (1995), discipline is defined as “…order among pupils so learning can take place without competition from unproductive forces” (p. 2). Teachers are required to maintain a safe and orderly learning environment in their classrooms, but are not always able to do so. Students with challenging behaviors cause teachers to waste instructional time in order to intervene and manage the student. Despite the common use of a variety of preventative and intervention techniques, such as, establishing rules, planning smooth transitions, and using token-reward systems, preventing discipline problems still remains an issue. Oftentimes, teachers will resort to quick-fire strategies, such as scolding students or placing them out of the class in order to gain control of the class. These types of management techniques are reactionary in nature and tend to backfire, as students will most likely engage in repeat offenses due to reinforcement (Ducharme, 2011).

Smith and Rivera (1995) explored the possible origins of discipline problems. They propose that there are circumstantial elements, such as teacher expectations not matching the developmental level of the students, misuse of the physical classroom environment, and ill-planned transitional times that lead to disruptive behavior (Smith & Rivera, 1995). They also suggest that boredom, frustration, or an innate desire on the part of the students to be disruptive may be the culprit. Finally, they examine the population of students that actually have behavioral disabilities, which may or may not have been diagnosed, and their inclusion into general education settings as a potential reason for discipline issues. The reason being that these students needs are not being met and they are targeted by their general education peers. Regardless of the reasons why discipline problems occur, an effective intervention is needed.

The current instructional strategies regarding the discipline used within New York City schools are prescribed in the Citywide Standards of Intervention and Discipline Measures (2011 Discipline Code). It describes in detail unacceptable behaviors, one of which is disruptive behavior that interferes with the educational process, and the disciplinary measures that are used to address them. A combination of guidance interventions, such as parent outreach, individual behavior contracts, and intervention by counseling staff are used in conjunction with a variety of disciplinary responses such as, student/teacher/parent conferences, referrals to administration, and detention or exclusion from extra-curricular activities.For students with special needs, the New York State Education Department offers behavioral assessments and intervention plans, along with individualized education programs that focus on providing positive behavior support.

The behavior management strategies that are used in schools today focus on the authority of adults and the consequences that they issue to students as a way to manage problem behaviors. This leads to students relying on external reinforcements as a motivation to behave, rather than making them responsible by developing the skills they need on their own. An easier form of intervention is to teach students how to manage their own behavior. This would benefit teachers by allotting more time for teaching, and would make students more self-reliant.

Self-management is an alternative intervention method for behavior management that is increasingly being used in classrooms. McConnell (1999) defined self-management as “a cognitive-based intervention that teaches students to change and manage their own behavior” (p. 18). Studies have shown that self-management procedures can be used not only to improve students’ behavior, but their academic performance as well (Prater, 1994), including the completion of homework assignments (Axelrod, 2009). Rafferty reports that there are five types of self-management interventions, which are self-monitoring, goal setting, self-evaluation, self-instruction and strategy instruction (2010). Self-monitoring, in particular, is one of the most popular methods used and has had the largest amount of research done out of all five intervention types (Rafferty, 2010). Sheffield and Waller (2010) define self-monitoring as:

monitoring one’s behavior by keeping track of how often a target behavior occurs by making a mark on a form at predetermined times during a designated class period as an intervention strategy to reduce problematic classroom behavior. (p. 7).

There are many pros of self-monitoring, of which one is that it can reduce problem behaviors, and is effective over a wide range of age levels (from preschool to high school) and ability levels (general and special education classrooms) (Sheffield & Waller, 2010). Numerous studies (de Haas-Warner, 1991; Freeman, 2004) have been conducted that prove the positive effects of self-monitoring on the reduction of problem behaviors as well as improvement of on-task behaviors in different grade levels; in both general education (DuPaul & Hoff, 1998; Harris, Friedlander, Saddler, Frizzelle & Graham, 2005) and special education classrooms (Amato-Zech, Hoff, Doepke, 2006); in students with a variety of learning disabilities, such as autism (Alber-Morgan, DeBar, Legge; 2010); mental retardation (Hughes & Boyle, 1991), emotional and behavioral disorders (Jolivette, Patton & Ramsey, 2006), and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (Mathes & Bender, 1997). Additional research reports by Ganz, Ozkan and Sonmez (2011) have been written that reviewed multiple studies on students with disabilities, which also showed self-monitoring to be an effective intervention. One study by Reid (1996) further examined self-monitoring’s effectiveness on students with learning disabilities and compared its effects on attention and performance by reviewing previous studies. The fact that this method has been tested on such diverse student populations, yet consistently showed positive results speaks to the ability of children to be self-aware and develop self-control. As students get older, these traits become increasingly important and necessary to function well in society.

Another pro of self-monitoring is that it can be implemented in a variety of ways yet still maintain its effectiveness in the managing of behavior. Research (Alber-Morgan, DeBar & Legge, 2010) has shown that students can be taught to use self-monitoring procedures using the assistance of a tactile/auditory prompt called a MotivAider or picture representations called Countoons (Daly & Ranalli, 2003). These aids are beneficial for students because they stimulate the sight and touch senses triggering their focus on their behavior. Self-monitoring can also be combined with other methods to form an intervention package. Studies (Fowler, 1986; Mitchem, Young, West, Benyo, 2001) have been done that paired peer-monitoring with self-monitoring where both methods were used on the whole class. Students are known to be influenced by their peers, so having classmates assess each other in addition to their self-assessment can boost their desire to behave appropriately.

Other pros of self-monitoring are its cost-effectiveness due to the lack of needing expensive materials, the increased independence of students which leads to increased amounts of quality teaching time, and its use of a step-by-step procedure which is simple to teach to students (Vanderbilt, 2005).

The cons of self-monitoring is that most of the research has been done in specific target groups, therefore, there is not enough conclusive evidence that supports its extension to all students (Jull, 2009). According to an article by Dennis McDougall in the Journal of Remedial and Special Education, “although more than 240 self-management studies have been published over the past 3 decades, only 14 of these studies have targeted students with disabilities in general education settings” (1998). Further research needs to be conducted in general education settings.

One theorist that can be closely linked to the concept of self-monitoring is Dr. William Glasser (1925-). Glasser developed his “choice theory” based on the belief that people can control their own behavior. Bucher and Manning (2001) reported that Glasser believed that students should be able to change their behavior independently, rather than be managed with token/punishment systems. They also reported that Glasser theorized that the incentive for behaving stems from an internal desire to satisfy four basic psychological needs of belonging, power, freedom, and fun. He believed that when any of these needs are not met, misbehavior begins. The functionality of Glasser’s choice theory for students is referred to as “young adolescents' ability and need to accept responsibility for managing their own behavior” (Bucher & Manning, 2001). This idea of independently controlling behavior can be linked to the self-monitoring strategies that have been proven successful. Students that have disruptive behaviors are able to manage themselves and improve. When they do, they are accepted more by their peers and are able to participate in class activities without punishments. This would satisfy their need for belonging and fun. Also, it is possible that these students feel a sense of pride in knowing that if they are willing, they are capable of changing themselves. This would satisfy their need for power and freedom.

Statement of the Hypothesis

Implementing self-monitoring strategies to 5 second-grade students, three times per week for 45 minutes per day over a four-week period, at P.S. X in Brooklyn, New York, will decrease disruptive behaviors of talking at wrong times and getting out of their seats as measured by ABAB behavior management strategy.

**Methods**

Participants

The participants will be 5 second-grade students from P.S. X located in Brooklyn, New York in a general education classroom. They will have been identified by their teacher as having disruptive behaviors of talking out of turn and getting out of their seats.

Instruments

Parents of students, as well as the school principal and teacher will be given consent forms to grant their permission of the students’ participation. Students will be given a daily behavior sheet or checklist that they will use to self-monitor their disruptive behaviors.

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Appendix A: Parent Consent Form

Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Cecilia Gerald and I am a graduate student in the Childhood Education program at Brooklyn College. As part of my coursework, I am doing a study on the effects of self-monitoring (a behavior management technique) on students with disruptive behaviors in general education classrooms. In order to do my research, I need to work with a few students for 45 minutes per day, three times a week, for a total of 4 weeks. My goal is to help students decrease their disruptive behaviors by training them to manage their own behavior. The students will be trained to use the techniques during one school period in their regular classroom environment.

I am requesting your permission to incorporate any data I have gathered into my research report. Please note that all participants in this study will remain anonymous and any information regarding your child will be kept confidential. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at: cmg211@msn.com. I appreciate your support.

Thank you,

Cecilia Gerald

Appendix B: Principal Consent Form

Dear Principal,

My name is Cecilia Gerald and I am a graduate student in the Childhood Education program at Brooklyn College. As part of my coursework, I am conducting a study on the effects of self-monitoring (a behavioral management technique) on students with disruptive behaviors. I am interested in working with a few students in a general education setting three times a week, for 45 minutes, for a total of 4 weeks. My goal is to help these students decrease their disruptive behaviors by training them to manage their own behavior.

I would like your permission to use the students’ data in my research report. All of the participants in the study will be kept anonymous and all of the findings will be kept confidential. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at cmg211@msn.com.

I appreciate your support.

Thank you,

Cecilia Gerald

Appendix C: Teacher Consent Form

Dear Teacher(s),

My name is Cecilia Gerald and I am a graduate student in the Childhood Education program at Brooklyn College. As part of my coursework, I am conducting a study on the effects of self-monitoring (a behavioral management technique) on students with disruptive behaviors. I am interested in working with a few students in a general education setting three times a week, for 45 minutes, for a total of 4 weeks. My goal is to help these students decrease their disruptive behaviors by training them to manage their own behavior.

I would like your permission to work with your students’ and use their data in my research report. All of the participants in the study will be kept anonymous and all of the findings will be kept confidential. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at cmg211@msn.com. I appreciate your support.

Thank you,

Cecilia Gerald

Appendix D: Student Checklist